

Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group

1 (800) 315-6338 (MEET) Code: 58756# (KUSKO)

ADF&G Bethel toll free: 1 (855) 933-2433

July 12th, 2023

On Wednesday, July 12th, 2023, the KRSMWG meeting was called to order at 10:01 a.m. and adjourned at 11:21 a.m. Meeting time was approximately 1 hour and 21 minutes. A quorum was not immediately established with 6 full voting members in attendance. However, 1 members joined in later, establishing quorum for a short period before another member had to leave. Barbara Carlson chaired the meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS AND SUMMARY INFORMATION:

A. USFWS/KRITFC UPDATE: *Audio for this update begins at 13:00 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*

- Aaron Moses, USFWS, reported that there had been a 6-hour fishing opener the day before, July 11th. There are no other openers scheduled but USFWS and KRITFC will be looking over harvest data and meeting later this week. Laurie Boeck added that the meeting will be Friday, July 14th at 1:00 p.m.
- Fritz Charles asked KRITFC if there were any updates about when the federal special action will be rescinded, and control of the river handed back to the state. Laurie Boeck answered that they are waiting to see how the coho salmon run comes in.

B. ADF&G MANAGEMENT ACTIONS UNDER CONSIDERATION: *Audio for this update begins at 17:05 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*

- Nick Smith, ADFG, said that he had no new management actions to consider.

C. PEOPLE TO BE HEARD:

- There were no people to be heard during this meeting.

D. CONTINUING BUSINESS:

- Subsistence Reports: Lower River, Middle River, Upper River, ONC In-season Subsistence Report
 - Lower River
 - Fritz Charles, Tuntutuliak, said that he helped fish for 6 families in Tuntutuliak this year. His family is done outing away fish but they may catch a few more to put in the freezer or eat fresh. Mr. Charles added that he would be signing off in a few minutes. *Audio for this update begins at 20:40 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*
 - Albert Kawagley, Bethel, said that he would be headed to fish camp to help his family fish for slabbing, freezing, and canning. He said that his family has not been out in the last couple weeks. Mr. Kawagley said that he has noticed a lot of chums lately. He added that they are usually plentiful around July 4th, but they seem to be coming in a little later this year. He is grateful that the chum seem to be coming back. *Audio for this update begins at 22:05 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*
 - Alissa Rogers, Bethel, said that her family had gone out yesterday, July 11th, and caught so many they lost count. There were 2 female Chinook, but the majority were sockeye. Ms. Rogers said that caught some chums, but they were all turning color with big eggs. She believes they caught between 40-50 fish all together. *Audio for this update begins at 23:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*
 - Henry Hunter, Bethel, said that many people got a late start fishing due to the high water and missed the 1st two openers because of repairs needed to fish

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camp. Most are up and running now. Mr. Hunter said that he did good with sockeye, caught a few chums and did not target Kings this year. People requested another driftnet opener from KRITFC, so another opener was announced for the previous Tuesday. However, there was not as much traffic at the boat harbor as there was for previous openers. Many who did fish reported that they only went out for a couple hours and caught what they needed. Most fish caught were sockeye. Mr. Hunter mentioned that there were a lot of jack-sized Kings and that many were waiting on chums or silvers, adding that many people like to fillet or dry them. *Audio for this update begins at 28:15 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*

- ONC In-season Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 32:25 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*
 - Alissa Rogers, ONC, reported that ONC Fisheries are finishing up their projects for the season and the Natural Resources department has pivoted their attention to culture camp, which will continue through July 22nd. ONC has been speaking to people about subsistence needs and most people they spoke to said that they had completed fishing by July 17th and were wrapping up by the 23rd. Others are trying dipnetting and still others want a few more. ONC has been and is still working on surveys to determine if people have met their subsistence salmon goals. Ms. Rogers feels there is not enough data to make any conclusions yet. She also reported that yesterday ONC did their first aerial survey through the Partners program and has funds to do 3 more before the end of the season. She hopes that next week ONC will be able to report on the collected data and final numbers.
- Middle River
 - Allen Simeon, Aniak, said that he had set a net on the South side of the Kuskokwim and caught 11 jack Kings, 11 sockeye, and 5 chum. He observed another man drifting, but the drift was very short because he caught so many sockeye so quickly. Mr. Simeon said that they are “swamped” with reds in the Aniak area. He added that sockeye was rare in the 1960’s and when caught people would make stinkheads out of them. For this year Mr. Simeon said that he is done fishing. *Audio for this update begins at 25:35 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*
- Upriver
 - Barbara Carlson, Sleetmute, said that she has been running the fish wheel. Ms. Carlson said that she is catching mostly sockeye and they are beginning to switch from the late spawn reds to the river spawners. She added they are still getting a few Kings with a mixture of sizes. She is releasing the Kings to lay eggs. She has not seen many chums mixed in yet. Ms. Carlson reported that the water has been rising but that there is not a lot of debris. Chinook were put away and

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now people are concentrating on sockeye for the freezer. *Audio for this update begins at 38:25 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*

- Nikki Polluck, KRITFC, gave an update on subsistence fishing in the middle to upriver. She said that she had spoken to Tim Zuakar, the KRITFC commissioner for Crooked Creek. Mr. Zuakar reported that they had caught 18 sockeye and 12 chum salmon with the fish wheel and that he has seen smokehouses that are full. It has taken time for people to begin gathering for subsistence due to the breakup and flooding this year. Ms. Polluck said that Mr. Zuakar had also gone out driftnetting and caught 4 King salmon but let them go. Ms. Polluck said that many in the area have releasing Kings. She added that there are few places where people can drift because of snags and that people were catching a lot of sockeye and seeing some chums. *Audio for this update begins at 1:09:10 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*
- Headwaters
 - Dan Esai, Nikolai, said that he had been out of town, so he has not fished or spoken to others in the area about fishing. Mr. Esai said that people are concentrating on berries right now and it has been a good season for the berries. He hopes the cooler weather and water will help the salmon travel upriver. *Audio for this update begins at 40:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*
- KRITFC In-season Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 42:15 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*
 - Nick Smith, ADFG, said that this is usually where the in-season harvest reports are reviewed. Alissa, ONC said that they did not have one this week.
 - Some information can be found in the Informational packet beginning on page 12. Barbara Carlson noted that as of July 4th, 2023, chum harvest was at 20,700 and wanted to know how that compares to previous years.
 - Therese Schomogyi, KRITFC, gives cumulative chum and Chinook harvest numbers for previous years as of July 3rd. She went on to speak about current harvest estimates. During the July 4th opener approximately 100 Chinook, 280 chum, and just under 1,200 sockeye. She added that those numbers are probably a low estimate since KRITFC did not cover the entire opener. KRITFC also did not get an estimate from the previous Friday due to inclement weather. Ms. Schomogyi said that she believes that the Chinook harvest was lower than last year and more chum, but nowhere near historical levels.
 - Barbara Carlson said that survey responses and people talking say that they had caught what they needed and were satisfied, yet the harvest numbers are lower. Ms. Carlson asked why. Jim Simon, KRITFC, explained the cultural bias he feels may be contributing to this and said that people were grateful, but the amount harvested this year does not match the historical needs for subsistence in the area.

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- Overview of the Kuskokwim River salmon run assessment.
 - *Audio for this update begins at 50:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*
 - Sean Larson, ADFG, gives a brief update on Kuskokwim salmon assessment projects. The report begins on page 6 of the Informational Packet.
 - Some updates from Mr. Larson’s report are:
 - Chinook are near the end of their run with a BTF CPUE of 338 which is below average. 60,000 Chinook have passed by sonar which is about half of the number that had passed by this time last year.
 - Chum salmon have had a better run this year than last but are still low in numbers compared to historical averages. Chum are in the middle of their run and have been coming in strong and consistent over the last few days.
 - Sockeye numbers are just above what they were at this time in 2022 but have slowed down over the last couple days. Sockeye are near the midpoint of their run with approximately 144,000 fish past sonar.
 - Mr. Larson said that the weirs have had a slow start but the George, Talequena, Pitka Fork and Kogrukluk weirs are all fish tight. The George River weir has counted approximately 1,000 Chinook and 1,000 chum salmon. The Kogrukluk weir has counted about 200 of each species. Chinook numbers are below average at all the weirs so far. Pitka Fork, for example, has only counted 7 Chinook, but had passed 1,200 by this time last year.
 - Barbara Carlson asked a question about the difference between numbers for the BTF CPUE and why they are so different than sonar’s numbers. Mr. Larson explained that BTF provides an index of catch with a certain amount of effort that gives an index that can be compared over years. Sonar counts the actual numbers of fish passing.
 - Subsistence Division Project Update
 - *Audio for this update begins at 56:20 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*
 - Tim Bembenic gave a brief update on ADFG subsistence projects occurring on the Kuskokwim.
 - The local and traditional knowledge project on the lower Kuskokwim will have two researchers in Nunapitchuk to wrap up the mapping portion. The team will return in the fall to do a community review.
 - Field work has been wrapped up for the tributaries project and the writing portion of the project has begun.
 - Post-season surveys will be conducted in the fall. ONC will partner with the Subsistence division to complete in-home

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surveys in Bethel. Anybody who participates in these surveys will be entered into a drawing. Also, please make sure to fill in your subsistence calendars and turn them in to be entered into a drawing.

- Lastly, the natural indicators project aims to identify what signs or other observations local fishermen use to tell them when the salmon are coming to spawn and how that will unfold in the upper river. More interviews will be conducted in August 2023 and the team hopes to complete the project by December 2024.

▪ NVN Report

- *Audio for this update begins at 1:00:50 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*
- Dan Gillikin gives a brief report on Aniak Test Fish (ATF) and the Aniak Salmon River weir. Mr. Gillikin said the Chinook run has started to pick up, but the numbers are still very low. Chum salmon are coming in strong and are doing better than the last couple of years, but still relatively low numbers. ATF will conclude operations on July 14th and the crew will head up to work the George River weir internship project.
- The Salmon River weir is still not in because of unusually high water, but the crew was able to locate a site 100 yards downriver that may work instead. Some spare parts were needed for the project, so the crew gathered them and are headed back to get it installed.
 - Allen Simeon, Aniak, asked if Mr. Gillikin knew how many boats from lodges in the area fish in the Aniak River? Mr. Simeon believes that the Aniak River serves as a main spawning ground for Chinook, chum and coho salmon and wonders if there is a way sport fishermen could track how many fish were caught and released. Mr. Gillikin said that he did not know how many boats fished on the river and that he was aware of the concern mentioning a Board of Fisheries proposal meant to protect the spawning grounds. *Audio for this update begins at 1:03:15 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*
- Mr. Gillikin added that as a reminder the Aniak Box is now open to limited rod and reel fishing in the federal portion. He said he has not seen too many people take advantage of the opportunity. Those who have fished have not been very successful, but the water has been murky.

○ Working Group KRITFC Representative Report

- The Working Group KRITFC Representative was absent from this meeting.

○ Sport Fish:

- The sport fish representative was absent from this meeting.

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- John Chythlook, ADFG, said that due to the low numbers of returning coho during the 2022 season and he did not expect 2023 to be much better. Therefore he said that sport fishing will probably remain closed. *Audio for this update begins at 1:07:45 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*
- Intercept Fishery Report
 - *Audio for this update begins at 1:12:05 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*
 - Alaska Peninsula Inseason Commercial Harvest Estimates can be found on page 16 of the Informational Packet. On page 17 and 18 is some information on the Genetic Stock Composition of Chum Salmon Harvested in Commercial Salmon Fisheries of the South Alaska Peninsula.
 - Sean Larson, ADFG, summarizes this information. The project began in 2022 and will conclude in 2026. Under 15,000 chum have been sampled so far and about 10,000 samples genotyped. Results for the June fishery are on page 17 showing Coastal Western Alaska chum stock at 17.7%. The table on page 18 shows results from the June fishery and the Post June fishery.
 - Barbara Carlson stated that the WASSIP study had concluded about 50% were CWAK chum, but this study shows about 15%. Ms. Carlson asked Mr. Larson if that was due to hatchery fish. Mr. Larson answered that it was possible.

E. OLD BUSINESS:

- **Recruitment for vacant positions.**
 - Information about positions that are vacant or that need alternates are listed and described on page 20. No action was taken on this agenda topic since quorum had not been lost. Savannah Hollingworth, ADFG, gave a summary of the progress made on nominations for the WG. *Audio for this update begins at 1:17:05 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*

F. NEW BUSINESS:

- No new business was addressed at this meeting.

G. COMMENTS FROM WORKING GROUP MEMBERS:

- Dan Esai, Nikolai, commented that only 7 Chinook have passed by the Salmon Pitka Fork weir. He asked the Working Group to think about the openings on the Kuskokwim early in the season that KRITFC wanted and USFWS announced before the Working Group met this spring. He urges members of the Working Group members and fisheries managers to think about what effect that had on the fish headed for the headwaters. He is frustrated that USFWS took over when in his opinion there was nothing wrong with how the fishery was managed. Barbara Carlson added that the Working Group needs to talk about this subject before openings are announced. *Audio for this update begins at 17:35 – Meeting Audio – 7/12/23.*

Barbara Carlson made a closing comment regarding Dan Esai's concerns about Chinook and escapement at the Salmon Pitka Fork weir. Ms. Carlson said that fish are not getting to the headwaters and people downriver are now fishing harder earlier in the beginning of the season than they used to when the

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closures first began. She acknowledged that there wasn't much that the WG or ADFG could do but she urges people to talk to and voice your concerns to KRITFC members early in the season to encourage less fishing so early on the headwaters stock. *Audio for this update begins at 1:19:00 – Meeting Audio – 7/17/12/23.*

The meeting was adjourned at 12:21 p.m.

WORKING GROUP MOTIONS:

There were no motions made during this meeting as quorum was only met for approximately 10 minutes.

WORKING GROUP ATTENDANCE:

MEMBER SEAT:	NAME:
DOWNRIVER ELDER	<i>Absent</i>
UPRIVER ELDER	Allen Simeon
LOWER RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Mike Williams
MIDDLE RIVER SUBSISTENCE	Walter Morgan
UPRIVER SUBSISTENCE	Barbara Carlson
HEADWATERS SUBSISTENCE	Daniel Esai
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 1	Fritz Charles
MEMBER AT LARGE SEAT 2	<i>Absent</i>
WESTERN INTERIOR RAC	<i>Absent</i>
YK DELTA RAC	Alissa Rogers
COMMERCIAL FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
SPORT FISHING	<i>Absent</i>
ADF&G	Nick Smith
CHAIR	Barbara Carlson
<u>ADF&G Comm. Fish:</u> Nick Smith, Sean Larson, Dave Runfola, Iris Fletcher, Keegan Birchfield <u>Sport Fish Division:</u> John Chythlook, Klaus Wettig <u>Subsistence Division:</u> Tim Bembenic <u>Commissioner's Office:</u>	
<u>USFWS:</u> Laurie Boeck, Chris Tulik, Aaron Moses, Christian Alexie Jr., Emmitt Nicori <u>OSM:</u> <u>NVN:</u> Dan Gillikin <u>ONC:</u> Alissa Rogers <u>AVCP:</u> Jennifer Hooper <u>KRITFC:</u> Terese Schomogyi, Henry Hunter Sr., Nikki Polluck, Jim Simon <u>UAF:</u> <u>WIRAC:</u> <u>YK Delta RAC:</u> Alissa Rogers	
<u>WG Alternates: (not already listed above)</u> Albert Kawagley (1 st Member at Large)	<u>Media:</u> Evan Erickson (KYUK) <u>Other:</u> Ludi Gerricka (Aniak River Lodge), Jen Peeks, Tad Lindley

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS:

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (**ADF&G**), Orutsararmiut Native Council (**ONC**), Association of Village Council Presidents (**AVCP**), Georgetown Traditional Council (**GTC**), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (**USFWS**), Bethel Test Fishery project (**BTF**), Catch Per Unit Effort (**CPUE**), Coastal Village Seafoods (**CVS**), ADF&G Commercial Fisheries Division (**CF**), ADF&G Sport Fisheries Division (**SF**), ADF&G Subsistence Division (**SD**), Regional Advisory Council (**RAC**), Kuskokwim River Salmon Management Working Group (**KRSMWG**, **Working Group**, or **WG**), Sustainable Escapement Goal (**SEG**), Biological Escapement Goal (**BEG**), Management Objective (**MO**), Amounts Reasonably Necessary for Subsistence (**ANS**), Emergency Order (**EO**), Bering Sea Fishermen's Association (**BSFA**), Law Enforcement (**LE**), Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (**KRITFC**),

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